

product proposed by each bidder in the auction, and a maximum margin of the price acceptable to pay proposed by each bidder via the network; and

if the auction assumes a competitive state by the desired price information proposed by [one of] the plurality of bidders [coincides with the desired price proposed by another bidder and the auction assumes a competitive state], resolving the competitive state in accordance with the maximum margins proposed by the competitive bidders.

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17. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim 16,¹ wherein said competitive state resolving step determines a successful bidder as the bidder having proposed the largest maximum margin.

18. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim 17,² wherein said maximum margin is the difference between the price acceptable to pay and the desired price.

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19. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim 16,¹ further comprising the step of:

collecting an amount information on the product to be auctioned from each bidder.

~~5~~
20. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim ~~19~~⁴, wherein said competitive state resolving step resolves the competitive state using said amount information.

~~6~~
21. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim ~~16~~¹, further comprising the step of:
continuing the auction after the competitive state resolving step.

~~7~~
22. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim ~~16~~¹, wherein said collecting step is performed before the auction starts.

~~8~~
23. (Amended) The computer-implemented auction method as claimed in claim ~~16~~¹, further comprising the step of:
if the auction does not assume a competitive state, determining a successful bidder as the bidder having proposed the highest desired price.

~~9~~
24. (Amended) [An] A computerized auction apparatus for performing an auction, the apparatus connected to a plurality of bidder terminals via a network, comprising:
means for providing information on a product to be auctioned via the network;

means for collecting [a] desired price information corresponding to a price desired to purchase [for] the product proposed by each bidder in the auction, and a maximum margin [of] corresponding to the price acceptable to pay proposed by each bidder via the network; and

means, if the auction assumes a competitive state by the desired price information proposed by [one of] the plurality of bidders [coincides with the desired price proposed by another bidder and the auction assumes a competitive state], for resolving the competitive state in accordance with the maximum margins proposed by the competitive bidders.

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25. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim 24,⁹ wherein said competitive state resolving means determines a successful bidder as the bidder having proposed the largest maximum margin.

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26. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim 25,¹⁰ wherein said maximum margin is the difference between the price acceptable to pay and the desired price.

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27. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim 24,⁹ further comprising:

means for collecting an amount information on the product to be auctioned from each bidder.

¹³
28. (Amended) The computerized auction [method] apparatus as claimed in claim ~~27~~¹², wherein said competitive state resolving means resolves the competitive state using said amount information.

¹⁴
29. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim [23] ~~24~~⁹, further comprising:
means for continuing the auction after said competitive state resolves.

¹⁵
30. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim [23] ~~24~~⁹, wherein collection by said collecting means is performed before the auction starts.

¹⁶
31. (Amended) The computerized auction apparatus as claimed in claim [23] ~~24~~⁹, further comprising:
means, if the auction does not assume a competitive state, for determining a successful bidder as the bidder having proposed the highest desired price.

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~~32. (Amended) [An] A computerized auction apparatus for performing an auction, the apparatus connected to a plurality of bidder terminals via a network, comprising:~~

a storage device storing a program; and
a processor, connected to said storage device,
executing the following steps according to the program:

providing information on a product to be
auctioned via the network;

collecting [a] desired price [for] information
corresponding to a price desired to purchase the product
proposed by each bidder in the auction, and a maximum
margin corresponding to [of] the price acceptable to pay
proposed by each bidder via the network; and

if the auction assumes a competitive state by
the desired price information proposed by [one of] the
plurality of bidders [coincides with the desired price
proposed by another bidder and the auction assumes a
competitive state], resolving the competitive state in
accordance with the maximum margins proposed by the
competitive bidders.

33. (Amended) A program storage device readable and
executable by an auction apparatus for performing an auction
method, the apparatus connected to a plurality of bidder
terminals via a network, said method including the following
steps:

providing information on a product to be auctioned
via the network;